

AGENDA ITEM IV B

PROPOSED LETTER OF INTENT

**LOUISIANA STATE UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER-
NEW ORLEANS**

Ph.D. IN EPIDEMIOLOGY

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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Letters of Intent

Prior to the submittal of a proposal for a new academic program, a college/university must submit a Letter of Intent for assessment and approval. Letters of Intent serve two related purposes: 1) they allow the Board of Regents to decide whether campuses should continue to plan for the development of new academic programs; and 2) they serve to coordinate statewide the development of new academic programs. Letters of Intent **do not** serve as the mechanism to determine need, review curricula, assess resources, or approve a budget. These processes are accomplished during the full program proposal review.

Colleges and universities shall transmit Letters of Intent to the Commissioner of Higher Education for all new programs to be proposed, with the exception of proposed undergraduate programs below the baccalaureate level.

Procedures and timelines for Letters of Intent are as follows:

- 1. A Letter of Intent may be filed at any time.**
- 2. A separate document must be prepared for each projected program.**
- 3. Letters of Intent will be scheduled for consideration by the Board of Regents within ninety days (90) after receipt of documentation.**
- 4. A full program proposal may be submitted ninety (90) days after a Letter of Intent has been approved by the Board of Regents.**
- 5. Letters of Intent are valid for three years after approval by the Board of Regents. Upon expiration of this time period, a new Letter of Intent must be submitted.**

The following factors will be considered in assessing Letters of Intent:

- 1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.**
- 2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.**
- 3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the desegregation Settlement Agreement.**

4. **The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding. More specifically, the Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets certain funding criteria. (See “Staff Analysis” section below)**

Program Description

Per this Letter of Intent, the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-New Orleans seeks Board of Regents’ approval to submit a program proposal for a Ph.D. program in Epidemiology.

The Letter of Intent provides the following projected program objectives and description:

It is designed primarily for those who plan academic careers involving teaching and/or research and secondarily professional practice. The Doctor of Philosophy in Epidemiology degree is needed to fulfill in part one of the accreditation requirements for Schools of Public Health, which mandate a minimum of five Master of Public Health (MPH) concentrations and three doctoral level degrees. The PhD curriculum will include advanced coursework in epidemiologic theory, analytical and statistical methods, study design and data interpretation as well as research and instructional experience. The curriculum will culminate in the development and completion of a dissertation generating new knowledge in the field of epidemiology based on independent research.

Graduates completing the PhD will have developed the ability to:

1. *Understand and be able to apply epidemiologic theory and methods towards the development of innovative research projects;*
2. *Conduct independent research in topic areas relevant to epidemiology and public health;*
3. *Translate research findings into development of evidence-based clinical, translational, and public health programs, practices, and policies;*
4. *Develop epidemiology curricula and instruct students using a variety of teaching methods;*
5. *Interpret and communicate important research findings to the broader community;*
6. *Assume leadership roles in academic institutions, governmental agencies focusing on epidemiologic and public health research, and health-related non-governmental organizations (NGO).*

STAFF ANALYSIS

The Board of Regents follows established criteria in evaluating Letters of Intent, as described in the “Background” section of this agenda item. The following four issues are primary considerations:

1. The program must be within the role and scope of the institution.

According to *Role, Scope, and Mission Statements* of the Master Plan for Public Postsecondary Education: 2001, the projected program is consistent with the stated role, scope, and mission of the Health Sciences Center.

2. The program must not be needlessly duplicative of those at other institutions of higher education.

The University notes that there is no state university/college currently offering a doctoral-level program in Epidemiology. Accordingly, the staff concludes that unnecessary duplication is not a relevant issue.

3. The program shall be consistent with the mandates of the Desegregation Settlement Agreement.

As the 1994 Desegregation Settlement Agreement makes no mention of any degree in Epidemiology within its prescribed list of required new programs, desegregation issues are not a relevant concern.

4. The program shall adhere to specific criteria for funding.

Recalling acceptable financial criteria as stated in the Letter of Intent policy:

The Board of Regents shall not approve planning for a new academic program unless the prospective program meets one or more of criteria 1-5 below:

- 1. The program will be formulated through a reorganization of existing courses, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, new options or concentrations in existing programs).**
- 2. The program will be funded by concomitant reductions in expenditures, requiring no additional State expenditures for at least five years (for example, programs funded by the reallocation of resources from terminated or consolidated programs).**
- 3. The program will be funded entirely through non-State monies for a period of five years.**
- 4. The program will demonstrably promote economic development in the State.**
- 5. The program is deemed indispensable to fulfilling the role, scope, and mission of the university or college and is deemed indispensable to fulfilling critical educational needs of the State.**

The Health Sciences Center notes in this proposal:

The only significant additional costs beyond the current expenditures to be incurred by the proposed program in the first five years will be for stipends and tuition waivers for the PhD students. (Sources of funding to cover these costs are described in Section C.2.) We anticipate that these costs can be absorbed from our current stipend funding by preferentially funding doctoral students. We will also seek Board of Regents fellowship(s) for the Epidemiology PhD Program. We do not anticipate that additional faculty positions, other than the two positions that are currently under recruit, will be required during the first five years of the program. After that time Program growth is expected to warrant additional faculty. Classrooms, conference rooms, office space, and computing facilities available in our new location as well as on the nearby LSUHSC campus are adequate for this time period which is concurrent with the exiting 5-year lease. There may be a need to add some relevant journals and textbooks to the current LSUHSC library holdings, but the associated costs will be minimal particularly given electronic access to journals through library services.

Further, the LSU System staff summary observes:

No additional state appropriations are projected to be necessary during the first five years of the projected program. The only additional costs beyond current expenditures to be incurred will be for student stipends and tuition waivers for Ph.D. students. The School anticipates absorbing these costs from current stipend funding by preferential funding of doctoral students and support from the Health Sciences Center's School of Graduate Studies. Funding from the Board of Regents' Graduate fellows program will also be sought.

Accordingly, it appears the LSUHSC-NO is claiming that financial criteria #2, 4, and 5 apply wholly or in part to this Letter of Intent.

STAFF SUMMARY

The staff observes that this Letter of Intent represents part of a on-going effort by the LSUHSC-NO to develop a full-realized and accredited School of Public Health in Louisiana. The Council of Education in Public Health (CEPH) mandates a certain breadth and depth of program offerings before it will consider accreditation for a School. Already, the Health Sciences Center offers the required Master of Public Health with five concentration areas and a Ph.D. in Biostatistics. Now the Health Sciences Center must complete its program offerings with two more doctoral-level programs. This Letter of Intent represents one of those two yet to be approved and implemented doctoral programs.

The proposed program is well within the role, scope, and mission of the University. Program duplication is not a problem and desegregation issues are not relevant. It appears that the University has already begun preparation for eventual program implementation as recent faculty recruitment has been focused on new/replacement faculty with Epidemiology training and/or experience. As such, additional costs appear to be limited largely to more student support. The Health Sciences Center has put forth a plan to afford these costs without requesting new state

support. Whether this statement or the previous claim of adequacy in current faculty, facilities, equipment, etc., are accurate cannot be determined without benefit of an on-site review of the completed proposal. The final report issued by external consultants should respond to the issue more definitely and provide guidance to both the Health Sciences Center University and the Regents as to future program prospects.

Given these circumstances, the staff tenders the following recommendation:

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The staff recommends that the Academic and Student Affairs Committee grant conditional approval for the proposed Letter of Intent for the projected Ph.D. program in Epidemiology (CIP Code 26.1309) at the Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center-New Orleans. Any forthcoming proposal as a result of this Letter of Intent shall address funding concerns as expressed in the staff summary.